

# The “New” New Orleans

This Southern belle is back in business

by carrie williamson

**S**un ricochets from the newly installed bronze panels covering the Louisiana Superdome. Due to be completed next year, the \$85 million facelift of the building that came to symbolize Hurricane Katrina's wrath is perhaps the most striking evidence of New Orleans' resurrection. While the alluring clichés of this city with soul thankfully remain intact, there's much to love about the “new” New Orleans. The addition of freshly renovated hotels, innovative restaurants and must-do experiences you couldn't have anywhere else is enriching the melting pot of food, music and culture that has enticed everyone from Joe Average to author Tennessee Williams for decades.



### Hotel Scene: Old-School With a Twist

Unlike Oscar-winning actress Sandra Bullock, who purchased an 1876 Garden District mansion in 2009, you don't have to plunk down \$2.25 million to find a fashionable place to lay your head. Waltz through the spinning brass doors of The Roosevelt New Orleans as have a who's who of celebrities and politicians. After a \$145 million renovation, the lobby has been restored to former grandeur, with gilded columns soaring from the original terrazzo floors toward the crystal chandeliers. Definitely spend a relaxing afternoon at the European-style Guerlain Spa or under a cabana by the rooftop pool.

A funky base more to your liking? Check into the Hotel le Marais in the historic French Quarter. Colorful modern furnishings and geometric carpets set the tone for fun, while black-and-white oil paintings of the Louisiana swamp and a small saltwater pool in the brick courtyard remind you of where you are. With freebies galore—welcome cocktail at Vive! Lounge, fitness center, Wi-Fi and an expanded continental breakfast—it's one of the best values in town. Request an interior room ... preferably with a balcony.

### Dining Scene: Beyond Jambalaya

According to local foodie Tom Fitzmorris, New Orleans has more restaurants than ever, a challenge to your precious dining time.

Domenica is celebrity chef John Besh's sophisticated Italian restaurant in the Central Business District (CBD). While the designer furnishings are out of an *Architectural Digest* spread, the food is the focus. Executive Chef Alon Shaya spent a year living in Italy, perfecting the art of curing meats, preparing delicate homemade pastas and recreating authentic thin-crust pizzas. From house-cured duck breast to stracci—torn pasta with an oxtail ragu and chicken

■ Previous page: the saltwater pool and patio at Hotel le Marais

Bottom: There's still a party every night on Bourbon Street

Center: The French Quarter offers plenty of shops and bistros



■ Domenica



PHOTOS BY (BOURBON STREET) STEVE ALLEN/GETTY. (OTHERS) CHRIS ROGERS

livers—to a simple Margherita pie, he has more than succeeded.

A short stroll away is Cochon Butcher, a hip urban eatery meets butcher shop meets deli where renowned chef Donald Link and his partner, Stephen Stryjewski, pay homage to pork and other meats. The selection of elevated bar food varies, but for an outstanding lunch, choose one of the mouth-watering sandwiches on the chalkboard hanging above the "Swine" bar. Ranging from juicy pork belly on white bread with mint and cucumber to a "Buckboard bacon melt" (with Swiss, collards and pepper aioli), they are masterpieces of flavor.

Occupying the same corner in the CBD since 1938,







■ Take a tour of Blaine Kern's Mardi Gras World

local eatery Mother's Restaurant may not be a new addition to the restaurant scene, but everyone sure was glad when it re-opened. The step back in time—linoleum tables and chairs, decades of photos lining the brick walls, an old Hires root-beer keg hanging from the ceiling—is worth the long lines. While breakfast is served all day, at lunch you'll find red beans and rice, fried chicken, and gumbo among the chalkboard specials.

#### Must-Dos: Quintessentially New Orleans

Turns out the magic of Mardi Gras is a year-round experience found on the banks of the Mississippi at Blaine Kern's Mardi Gras World. While the entertaining tour provides interesting facts, it's the behind-the-scenes peek at float-building that will blow you away.

Back in the Quarter, forgo the traditional carriage ride for a more novel Segway tour. After a 15-minute training video, you'll be whizzing past historic homes, taking in the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum, French Market and Riverwalk along the way, with your licensed tour guide enriching the experience. That evening, check out Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Play-

PHOTOS BY CHRIS ROGERS

house at the Royal Sonesta Hotel. The oh-so-talented trumpeter has miraculously resurrected the sophisticated jazz club smack in the middle of Bourbon Street. The decor—white leather banquettes, red-and-gold-striped drapes hanging behind the corner stage, a subtle rainbow of lights fading in and out behind the bar—almost rivals the music. On Wednesdays, don't miss the NOJO Jam, when Mayfield surrounds himself with a talented group of regulars.

But there's good reason to wander off Bourbon Street to the Arts District to check out The National WWII Museum. In November 2009, the Solomon Victory Theater opened with hourly screenings, seven days a week of "Beyond All Boundaries," a 4-D cinematic journey spanning from Pearl Harbor to the end of the war. Three museum stores carry an impressive array of World War II books, DVDs, miniatures and even reproduction vintage dresses and jewelry.

After all of the shopping, dining and seeing what there is to see, make sure you leave yourself some quiet time. Just a few moments, here and there, to bask in the beauty and open-arms hospitality of this "new" historic city. ■



#### Sucré—A Touch of Sweetness

Stepping into Sucré, a confectionary, gelateria and coffee shop rolled into one, is a real treat. Pale pink, blue, yellow and green jump out from the neatly stacked rows of French macarons by the pastry case, where a simple slice of cake is elevated to high art. Winding your way past the gelato line reveals rows of artisanal chocolates in the back case, exquisitely colored boxes tied with chocolate ribbons lining the shelves above. There are few more divine spaces in New Orleans to while away a bit of time over an espresso or glass of champagne and the sweet of your choice. ([shopsucre.com](http://shopsucre.com))

■ Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse at the Royal Sonesta Hotel



■ Violet pear martini at Vive Lounge in the Hotel le Marais



## Where to find them

**The Roosevelt New Orleans**  
504-648-1200  
[therooseveltneworleans.com](http://therooseveltneworleans.com)

**Hotel le Marais**  
504-525-2300  
[hotellamarais.com](http://hotellamarais.com)

**Domenica**  
504-648-6020  
[domenicarestaurant.com](http://domenicarestaurant.com)

**Cochon Butcher**  
504-588-7675  
[cochonbutcher.com](http://cochonbutcher.com)

**Mother's Restaurant**  
504-523-9656  
[mothersrestaurant.net](http://mothersrestaurant.net)

**Blaine Kern's Mardi Gras World**  
504-361-7821  
[mardigrasworld.com](http://mardigrasworld.com)

**Segway New Orleans Tours**  
504-942-1970  
[segwaynola.com](http://segwaynola.com)

**Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse**  
504-553-2299  
[irvinmayfield.com](http://irvinmayfield.com)

**The National WWII Museum**  
504-528-1944  
[nationalww2museum.org](http://nationalww2museum.org)

\*Street addresses available online or by phone